DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CRS/IPR
RELEASE
PA or FOI EXCEPTIONS

12/11/78

1826

WP 12/11 1 of 2

Justice Dept. Vows To Probe Causes Of Guyana Deaths

By Leonard Downie Jr. and Charles R. Babcock
Washington Post Staff Writers

The Justice Department declared its intention yesterday to find out exactly how and why more than 900 Americans died in the jungle of Guyana and whether any Peoples Temple church survivors there or in the United States pose a danger to other Americans.

"We want to know who led it, who planned it and how did these events come about," said Assistant Attorney General Philip B. Heymann, referring to the forced mass suicide of 911 American members of the Peoples Temple in Jonestown, the murder of Rep. Leo J. Ryan (D-Calif.) and four others at a nearby airstrip, and the murder of four other temple members in the capital city of Georgetown.

The Justice Department's legal jurisdiction is limited specifically to trying to find and prosecute Ryan's murderers, because of a statute that makes conspiracy to murder a congressman a federal crime. But Heymann told reporters at a briefing yesterday that the investigation also will try to determine whether there is "any future danger for American citizens," from surviving cult members.

The FBI is checking reports that members of the cult once compiled a "hit list" of prominent politicians and journalists to be kidnaped or assassinated if something happened to the cult, Heymann said. But he cautioned that some of the allegations were "dated," and said at one point, "I don't want to suggest we have a valid list."

Justice Department briefings about ongoing investigations are rare, but officials said yesterday's unusual session was held because of the intense public interest and voluminous press inquiries about the federal investigation of the massacre in Guyana. At one point, Heymann said that Justice wanted to help answer the question of "how 900 people can be made to kill themselves."

The Justice Department also revised the total number of bodies of American dead airlifted from Guyana to the U.S. Air Force base at Dover, Del., to 911. There is relatively little hope that many more survivors will be found.

Guyanese police sources had said in Georgetown last week that a Venezuelan law enforcement official passed along to them a report from a pilot of a Venezuelan border patrol plane who said he saw perhaps 30 to 40 people in the rain forest in Guyana heading toward the Venezuelan border. However, officials here in Guyana and Venezuela said yesterday they knew nothing about any such sighting and are not aware of any evidence of possible Jonestown survivors in Venezuela.

Among the other questions that remain unanswered is how many of cult leader Jim Jones' top lieutenants, many of whom were armed security guards in Jonestown, are among the survivors.

Guyanese authorities believe they have under arrest the only survivor among the Jonestown gunmen who ambushed Ryan and his party at the Port Kaituma airstrip. That man, Larry Layton, 22, from San Francisco, has been charged in court in Guyana with the five murders.

If Layton is put on trial there as expected, he could not be extradited later to face more charges in the United States, because of the terms of the extradition treaty between the two countries, Heymann said. "We will do anything in our power," he added, "to assist Guyana in its investigation."

Earlier attempts to send a team of FBI investigators to Guyana were rejected by the Guyanese government. But the State Department now has arranged for four FBI evidence specialists to fly there, sources said. They were expected to arrive in Georgetown last night.

One Justice Department source said the FBI agents will photograph and examine the scene of the murders and suicides, but will not interview survivors or suspects in the murders.

Heymann also said yesterday that the U.S. government has decided to perform autopsies on four random victims of the forced mass suicide to determine the cause of death. The Guyanese government earlier had asked for an autopsy of Jim Jones, and the Justice Department decided too, to examine the bodies of Jones' mistress, and—after a request from his parents—the doctor Lawrence Schacht, who mixed the batch of poisoned soft drink.

None of the other five or six gunmen identified by survivors of the airstrip massacre is known to be alive, according to the Guyanese authorities. But Michael Abbell, the Justice Department attorney coordinating the U.S. investigation, said Wednesday that thus far just two of the gunmen have been identified as being among the dead.

Heymann, who said repeatedly yesterday that he did not want to discuss specifics of the U.S. investigation because that might hinder future prosecutions or the parallel probe in Guyana, added "a number of [the airstrip shooting suspects] will probably have turned out not to have survived."

Peoples Temple survivors have said they also fear others among the survivors, especially those still under house arrest by the Guyanese authorities in the cult's Georgetown headquarters house. Jim Jones' 19-year-old son, Steve, and other members of the Jonestown basketball team who are inside the house have been accused by other survivors of being trained, sharpshooting members of the Jones town security force.

One resident of the Georgetown house, Charles Beikman, 43, from Indianapolis, has been charged with the murder of fellow temple member Sharon Amos Harris and her three children, who were found inside the house with their throats slashed on the night of the forced mass suicide in Jonestown. Guyanese police are still investigating whether others in the house also were involved in the murders.

The deputy police commissioner in Guyana, Cecil A. Roberts, told reporters there yesterday that most of the survivors in the house and those staying under police guard in a Georgetown hotel have been cleared of involvement in any crimes. He indicated that they may be released to return to the United States as soon as this weekend.

He said all the survivors have been interviewed to determine whether any more should be detained as suspects or witnesses. Those interviewed, Roberts said, described at least three "dry

STATE DEPT. CALLED LAX ON MASS DEATHS

Lawyers Say They Sent Warnings on Cult for More Than a Year

By ROBERT LINDSEY
Special to The New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO, Nov. 30 — The State Department received explicit warnings for more than a year that the lives of American citizens were in jeopardy at the People's Temple commune in Guyana and that the Guyanese Government had been corrupted by the Rev. Jim Jones, according to two lawyers.

The lawyers, who represented defectors from the sect who were concerned about relatives and friends still loyal to Mr. Jones, said that they had made three visits to the State Department starting in August 1977 and had written numerous letters warning of the situation in Guyana. They said that they had also sought help from United States officials in Guyana but received little response.

Last June 15, the lawyers said, they sent an affidavit to the State Department signed by a defector from the cult, Deborah Layton Blakey, asserting that Mr. Jones was "sick" and was plotting "mass suicide for socialism." She said that she was convinced that "Reverend Jones had sufficient control over the minds of the residents that it would be possible for him to effect a mass suicide."

The lawyers said that they had received no reply to the warning from the State Department.

"We were shouting into a tunnel," Jeffrey Haas, one of the lawyers, said. "We hold the State Department responsible for the deaths of these people," his colleague, Margaret Ryan, said, referring to the more than 900 members of the commune who committed suicide or were murdered Nov. 18.

In September 1977, they conceded, the State Department, at their request, filed a formal protest to the Guyanese Government complaining of apparent "intervention" by that Government in the country's judicial process in a dispute involving the custody of a child that Mr. Jones contended was his.

But, they asserted, the United States Government did not follow up the matter even after Joseph Freitas, the San Francisco District Attorney, wrote to President Carter and other senior American officials asserting that the rights of American citizens were being suppressed in Guyana in the custody fight.

Seduction and Blackmail

The child, who died in Guyana last week, was the son of a former church member, Grace Stoen, and her husband, Timothy, although Mr. Jones asserted that he had fathered the child.

In an interview, Mrs. Blakey, a former member of Mr. Jones's inner leadership circle, asserted that high officials of the Guyana Government had been compromised by Mr. Jones, who sent female members of the commune to seduce and then blackmail them. She said that one of the highest ranking officials of the Guyanese diplomatic corps had a mistress assigned to him by Mr. Jones.

Mrs. Blakey is the sister of Larry Layton, who is being held in connection with the slaying of Representative Leo J. Ryan, the California Democrat who went to Guyana to investigate the commune.

Mrs. Blakey said that before she left the commune last May 12, she was part of a delegation that made daily visits to the Russian Embassy in Georgetown, Guyana, to negotiate the transfer of the commune to the Soviet Union. She said that the negotiations had proceeded slowly but had been scheduled to accelerate after her departure. She said that the Soviet intelligence agency, the K.G.B., had sent at least one agent to investigate the commune.

Told Not to Go to Press

She asserted that United States officials at the American Embassy in Georgetown were "extremely close" to Mr. Jones, and she said that one of them, Richard McCoy, had told her not to take her assertions of oppression and possible mass suicide to the press.

The warning, she said, came in a telephone conversation with Mr. McCoy after she left the country and he was in Washington.

A few days after the call, she said, she received a letter, apparently from Mr. Jones, that referred to her conversation with Mr. McCoy and threatened her life if she took her complaints to the press.

Mr. McCoy, in a brief telephone interview from Washington, where he is now stationed, acknowledged that he had advised Mrs. Blakey not to go to the press but said that he had done so because going to the press would not be effective in dealing with the problems in Guyana.

He also said that he had told her instead to go to a law enforcement agency. He denied that he had ever told Mr. Jones about his conversation with Mrs. Blakey.

Mr. McCoy said that he could not discuss other charges made by Miss Blakey unless the interview was approved by Hodding Carter, the senior State Department spokesman. Subsequently, Mr. Carter approved a longer interview, but a few minutes later the State Department rescinded the approval and said that Mr. McCoy would not be available to answer questions.

Mrs. Blakey's June 15 affidavit forecasting the possibility of mass suicide was sent to Stephen A. Dobrenchuk, chief of the State Department's emergency and protection services division; Elizabeth A. Powers of the department's special counselor services, and Douglas J. Bennet Jr., Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional relations.

The covering letters asserted, "While the State Department has made some contact with American citizens living in Jonestown, its investigation to uncover the actual conditions is inadequate."